

Moeser House  
Near Rumford  
King William County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-154

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office  
for Southeast Unit

## MOESER HOUSE

Near Rumford, King William County, Virginia

Owner: Chalkley Beverley (colored)Date of erection: Early nineteenth centuryBuilder: German immigrant named MoeserPresent condition: RuinousDescription:

This house is unique in Virginia as being a purely Germanic type without any native characteristics. It is one full story high with two stories in the roof. The raising of the plate four feet above the second floor allows this unusual condition. In plan it has a single large room on the first floor with a winding stair ascending in the southwest corner. There is an entrance door in the north and south sides, with a single window to the east in each case. A small chimney in the east wall is modern; all evidence of the original is missing. It may have been the house was heated by porcelain stoves as in Germany, of which practice there are examples in Winston-Salem (see forthcoming Johnston and Waterman, Early Architecture of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, 1941). The second floor, which now has all partitions removed, until 1939 had sheathed partitions dividing it into two sizable bedrooms to the east, a hall and hall room to the west. The stair was particularly well constructed and, while sheathed in below, had an interesting balustrade at the second floor composed of square balusters set diagonally, and a square newel post the finial of which was cut in the form of a polygon. This was all in natural wood, perhaps light walnut. The partitions were of pine with unmoulded joints. The two doors to the east rooms were not mates, one being a four-panel door, with bead and bevel moulding, the total thickness of which was 7/8 inch. The other door was of the type found in areas of Dutch and German settlement, in that it was sheathed with wide horizontal cleats laid on to form panels. It is the writer's recollection that there were two large panels, one above and one below the lock rail. The outside walls and the ceilings of these rooms were sheathed, but in the attic room the framing was all exposed. This room was hardly usable, being only about 6 feet high at the ridge of the roof.

The structure of the house is of logs, squared, and halved at the corners up to the gable line, above which the ends were studded. At the time of the survey the east, north, and west walls were of weatherboards; but, as the rear walls had the logs exposed, it is

probable that the other walls had the construction exposed and only the gables were weatherboarded. The logs are about five inches thick and about  $8\frac{1}{2}$  to 12 inches wide.

The front and back have a window and door on the first floor and two low windows on the second. In the west wall there is a higher second-floor window and one in the gable. The east wall has a pair of tall narrow windows on the second floor and two small square ones in the gable. The basement was previously open, with brick piers at the corners, but this was later closed in and excavated. There is a doorway in the south wall with double doors. Since the latter are cut down, they are evidently from another location. Of unusual design and detail, they are sheathed vertically on the inside and diagonally on the outside between cleats laid on to resemble panels. These divide each door into two equal panels. The edges of the vertical boards are moulded in cyma form, the two placed together forming an ogee recess. This is seen in Hudson Valley work.

The roof is gabled, running east and west at slightly under 45 degrees with pronounced splays at the eaves. It was evidently originally shingled, as old shingle lath remain in place and the north slope of the roof was shingled when measured.

The front door and the windows are particularly interesting features of the structure. The door is divided into four equal sections, the two lower filled with panels which project slightly from the rails and stiles with a beaded water-shedding moulding planted on the top. The upper sections are glazed in two equal lights. The glazing was recessed so a wood shutter could cover the opening at night. The door had a moulded architrave trim which was used on the other openings as well.

The windows are unique in the experience of the Survey, except in the case of the Brewery at Zoar, Ohio (O-291), also built by German immigrants. They are two-leaf casements, with fixed transoms in the large lower windows. The detail of the sash and frames is particularly interesting. The sash is  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick, with the muntins unmoulded but beveled and puttied on the inside. The sash opens in so that the lower rail of the basements and transoms have a long beveled lip, like a beak, that projects to shed the water. There is no mullion, the casement stiles being rebated over each other with a flat astragal planted on over the joint. It should be noted that the casements are received by the jamb pieces for only about two-thirds of their depth, the remainder forming a moulded lip that laps over the jamb piece and forms a double windbreak. This condition also occurs at the meeting stile, stool, and head. The hardware is notable for its delicacy and simplicity but is all in hand-wrought iron. The hinges are

vertical strips with a butt that fits over a pintle. There is a turnbuckle to lock the casements at the stool of the active sash.

Altogether the Moeser house can be considered one of the most important and least adulterated of Virginia buildings of German origin. There are larger structures in the Shenandoah and Page Valleys, but none of these appears as unaffected by English influence as this smaller example.

Additional data:

Nothing is known about the history of the Moeser house except the local tradition that it was built by "an old German about a hundred years ago." Moeser must have lived to be very old, as locally he is referred to as not having been long dead. One would say that he died perhaps c. 1900. The house is shown on Civil War maps of King William County in the Library of Congress.

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